ACES Monthly

This month we spotlight the ACES-RP training, system trouble reporting, and the data model to include a look at the DoD data dictionary.

ACES-RP

The recently completed ACES-RP tele-teach sessions provided an opportunity for Air National Guard (ANG), Air Force Reserve, and active duty Real Estate personnel to receive hands-on ACES Real Property processing training. Overall feedback has been positive and viewed as a significant benefit to assist the users with a much more detailed and thorough understanding of the system and capabilities it provides. The week-long course also covered the utilization of the Discoverer product to selectively retrieve information not readily available from standard sources in ACES-RP. As the ACES-RP system knowledge increases, so will the processing capability and product utilization. For the ANG personnel, this was a follow on to an earlier training class specifically designed by the ANG for their Real Property technicians. Training is the cornerstone for having correct ACES-RP data, which is a centerpiece for our entire ACES system.

Automated System Trouble Reporting

Recently, there have been a number of complaint notices going directly to very senior levels with little effort to work fixes at the lower levels first. Experience with the release of the first major ACES module developed from the ground up (Project Management) revealed a need to improve the trouble reporting process. Fielded software has three main areas of user trouble:

- First, the software may be broken and require SSG to fix.

- Second, the business rules may be different and appear to function improperly.

- Third, training may not adequately cover features of the software.

Here's a recommended guide for reporting ACES problems:

1. **Problem Type**: BROKEN SOFTWARE

Symptom: Frozen screen, data will not input, error messages returned, etc.

Contact: Field Assistance Branch (Gunter), DSN 596-5771, Comm (334) 416-5771.

Customer Information Needed: "System Code" (WI) either ACES or WIMS (includes IWIMS).

2. **Problem Type**: UNFAMILIAR PROCESS/SOFTWARE SUGGESTION

Symptom: Business processes not clear, not sure what data to enter, why does software do/not do some function or feature, etc.

Contact: Your MAJCOM IPT representative. Each module is defined by a committee of user experts from the base, MAJCOMs, and Air Staff known as Integrated Process Teams (IPTs). Much of this information is web-posted with e-mail links. Please work through your MAJCOM representative first to avoid flooding the IPT chair. The MAJCOM IPT representative needs to screen issues to see if they were previously raised, are a MAJCOM-unique concern, are personal preferences, etc. Submit suggestions for possible future enhancement.

NOTE: IPTs must make a determination of when to close the door on requirements in order to allow software to be built, tested, and fielded. The MAJCOM IPT representative was *your* voting member in defining the ACES module.

Customer Information Needed: What was customer trying to do and why a perception that software is not working.

3. **Problem Type**: TRAINING MAY NOT ADEQUATELY COVER FEATURES OF THE SOFTWARE

Symptom: Functional area experts are not familiar with some software features.

Contact: Your MAJCOM IPT representative to find out when your initial implementation training is scheduled. Real Property module training concluded 1 Dec 00. Project Management module training will continue through Jun 01. Training for other ACES modules will be scheduled as they are developed.

Before running off and hitting the worldwide panic button, contact your systems administrator or BNCC and work through any connectivity issues with them first! It may be a local problem.

CEMAS Problem Corrected

HQ AFCESA/CEOM issued new business rules effective FY01 regarding cost center tracking changes in the cost distribution report feeding the General Accounting and Finance system. SSG strongly encourages bases to complete their End-of-Month (EOM) processing on the last day of the month. Unfortunately, the SSG staff missed a key event sequencing two CEMAS programs that had to be released before the October EOMs could be run. The errant programs were discovered late and rushed to testing for approval to release the software. SSG ultimately

fielded the programs 2 Nov 00 which created problems for bases that properly completed the EOM on time. Bases that did not process the EOM until after 2 Nov 00 were not affected. The problem was identified by Moody AFB GA early on 2 Nov 00 and was corrected by SSG by late morning. In all, 31 base EOMs were affected due to the SSG late load of an unannounced software release. Fortunately the problem can be corrected. Left as-is, bases may show data incorrectly against cost centers in MicroBAS. SSG fully accepted responsibility for the situation and agreed to help any base that needs to work corrections. SSG will ensure the system administrators are notified of software releases in the future, knowing the impact to their customers .

Data Dictionary
DoD Regulation 8320.1, signed by the Secretary of Defense, governs the DoD Data Dictionary, and compliance is mandatory. The process to make an existing application comply with this regulation is, to say the least, a very time-consuming one. HQ AFCESA/CEOM must comply with this regulation to meet the ACES Certificate of Networthiness. Many application development efforts within the DoD have traditionally given this regulation lip service saying, "Yes, we'll eventually have to do it," – yet not getting to it very quickly due to a small perceived return on investment.

A budgetary benefit to compliance is the reduced cost to create and maintain interfaces with systems outside of Civil Engineering. When an interface with an external system is required, someone has to bear the cost to develop and maintain that interface. If the other system is not deemed compliant, that application's Program Management Office is responsible for 100% of the cost of the life cycle of the interface. Given the AF/IL push to create a shared data environment for all Installations &

Logistics data, this has the potential to be cost-effective for us in the out-years.

In moving to a compliant database, a single logical data model, described in the next article, must be achieved first. Standard data elements enhance interoperability among DoD information systems, facilitate increased data sharing, reduce data handling costs, and lead to better data accuracy, consistency, and timeliness.

Ensuring compliance with the data dictionary requirements is the responsibility of AFCESA in conjunction with the technical team at SSG. This work will allow CE to be fully postured for many of the exciting new information technology initiatives underway at both Air Force and AF/IL levels.

Single Logical Database
Data, data, data. One of the reasons for an apparently slow ACES start is the enormous up-front investment in building a strong foundation. This will have enormous payback in the future through reduced costs of inputting, maintaining, reconciling, and verifying data. Currently, an extensive amount of daily effort is devoted to managing multiple copies or entries of data. Initial efforts will reduce the duplication of data within the CE automated systems and then work with other business partners to reduce even further. When this project started, there were approximately 6,309 data items in the Fire, FMO, Housing, Personnel, Readiness, Project Management, and Real Property modules, plus the general system itself. Development of the Logical model reduced the need to just 4,763 data items - - a 25% reduction! As the need for duplicative entries decreases, the effort expended by our personnel in entering, reviewing, and reconciling data is reduced. The efficiency of the new database will increase. The data modeling effort is

nearing completion and scheduled to be implemented early in 2001.

Coming Events
- 9 Jan 01: Start of the next Command ACES-PM training

- 2 Feb 01: ASG at Robins AFB GA

IT Wisdom
"Old ideas got that way because they proved useful"

Frank Hayes - ComputerWorld